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—THE TRIBUNE CREDO

THE RANSOM TO CASTRO

The American people owed a debt to the 1,113 prisoners held in Cuban jails since the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of April, 1961, and it has been redeemed by the payment of a ransom to Castro aggregating 53 million dollars in food and medicine. That debt was incurred because the President and his official family withheld adequate military support from the Cuban rebel landing force whose enterprise it had encouraged.

Mr. Kennedy acknowledged in his recent television report of his first two years in office that he had been wrongly advised and that he accepted the responsibility for the failure. In the negotiations to effect the release of the prisoners, the official pose of the United States government was that it sympathized with the objective but had no formal role.

This was, of course, a fiction. It is now known that the President's brother, Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy, was the mainspring in rounding up the tribute, and that he was joined by Gen. Lucius Clay and others in raising an additional \$2,900,000 in cash which was paid to Castro on his contention that this money was due for his release of 60 wounded prisoners last April.

Robert Kennedy was assisted by the deputy attorney general, Nicholas Katzenbach, by officials of the state department and internal revenue service, by tax experts, and by a staff of some 25 other government officials, who spent three weeks soliciting donations of drugs, medical supplies, and food.

The principal inducement was the fact that contributions would be tax deductible as charity because they were funneled thru the Red Cross. The pharmaceutical industry has been subject to government

harassment and regulation and has been investigated by Sen. Kefauver. It required no very hard sell to persuade the industry that it could stand a few friends at court.

Transportation services were provided without cost by railroads, air lines, and shipping companies, all subject to federal regulation and some the recipients of government subsidies. When the attorney general informed these various groups, "My brother made a mistake," and announced that the President felt the need to expiate his sense of guilt, that was persuasion enough.

So the government of the United States has reverted to practices that supposedly went out with the Barbary pirates. It may be recalled that there is an extended record of American refusal since the late 18th century to submit to blackmail.

Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, when ambassador to France, made the celebrated statement, "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute." Capt. William Bainbridge, having received the distasteful assignment to carry a payment of tribute to the Dey of Algiers in order to buy protection for American commerce in the Mediterranean, remarked, "I hope I may never again be sent to Algiers with tribute, unless I am authorized to deliver it from the mouth of our cannon."

Theodore Roosevelt responded to the kidnaping of an American citizen by Moroccan brigands with the declaration, "Pericardis alive or Raisuli [his captor] dead."

The Kennedy administration has achieved theoretical protection of its standing by using private persons and corporations as its proxies. Had it been more frank it would have gone to Congress for an appropriation to pay the bribe.

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